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ABSTRACT

This paper presents the portion of the collaborative project which discusses: (1) the vehicle which was developed for gathering data and the method of implementation; (2) an overview of the general perceptions held by students before beginning the collaborative project; (3) the shifts indicated by the descriptive data; and (4) observations based on these indicators. The paper explains that the survey itself consists of 11 pairs of prompts that ask students to indicate the responses that most closely represent their attitudes/beliefs about three types of institutions of higher education: 2-year public, 4-year public, and 4-year private. It states that the pre-project surveys were first distributed to the students on the day the essay assignment was introduced along with a brief explanation of purpose; the post-project survey was distributed two or three weeks after concluding the project. The paper reports the results and discusses them in detail; the Institutional Perceptions Questionnaire is attached. (NKA)

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Crossing Institutional Boundaries: Changing Common Perceptions.

by Maria A. Clayton

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CS 510 532

Collaborative Teaching, Collaborative Learning: Expanding Communities of Writing Teachers and Students Cross Institutional Boundaries

Conference on College Composition and Commur tion

Denver, Colorado

15 March 2001

II. Crossing Institutional Boundaries: Changing Common Perceptions

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This portion of our collaborative project discusses 1) the vehicle we developed for gathering our data and our method of implementation, 2) an overview of the general perceptions held by students before beginning the collaborative project, 3) the shifts indicated by the descriptive data, and 4) our observations based on these indicator.

The survey itself consists of eleven pairs of prompts (questions 2-23) that ask students to indicate the responses that most closely represent their attitudes/beliefs about three types of institutions of higher education: two-year public, four-year public, four-year private. Additionally, question 1 asks the student's affiliation. Question 24 asks for a "yes" or "no" response about the differences among the institutions' perceived roles and allows for written input, while question 25 allows for final, open-ended comments. The number of respondents included

	MTSU	Columbia	Bryan
Pre	36	26.	25
Post	31	23	20

Differences in the pre and post numbers are accounted for by enrollment attrition. The pre-project surveys were first distributed to our students on the day the essay assignment was introduced along with a brief

explanation of purpose. The post-project survey was distributed two or three weeks after concluding the project, as it suited our individual schedules best.

What were the general perceptions indicated by the data in the **pre-project** survey? The overwhelming majority of students shared common beliefs in matters that relate to accessibility and finances:

- ✓ two-year colleges offer the most **open admission requirements** AND four-year private the least (questions 2 & 3);
- ✓ two-year colleges offer the most **affordable costs** AND four-year-private the least (questions 4 & 5);
- ✓ four-year public spend the greatest **amount of time/money/energy on sports to the detriment of academic programs** AND two-year public the least (questions 22 & 23).

In terms of issues closely related to academics, the greatest percentages of students across institutions, but not necessarily majorities, believe that in the area of

- ✓ four-year public AND all three to an equal degree offer the most **academic resources** AND two-year public the least (questions 6 & 7);
- ✓ four-year private institutions AND all three to an equal degree offer the highest **level of faculty credentials and experience** AND two-year public the least (questions 8 & 9);
- ✓ four-year public give the least amount of **individual attention**; however, MTSU and Bryan students believe four-year private give the most, while Columbia students believe two-year public do (questions 10 & 11);
- ✓ four-year public have the lowest percentages **of students completing their degree** (questions 12 & 13);
- ✓ four-year private enroll the greatest number of **students who are academically prepared for college work** AND two-year public the least (questions 14 & 15);
- ✓ four-year private enroll students with the least **tolerance toward differences and openness to new ideas**; however, MTSU and Bryan students believe four-year public

enroll students with the most, while Columbia students believe two-year public do (questions 16 & 17);

- ✓ four-year private AND all three to an equal degree have the fewest number of **student behavior problems** (questions 18 & 19);
- ✓ two-year and four-year public enroll the fewest number of **students with a positive attitude towards learning**, while four-year private AND all three to an equal degree enroll the most (questions 20 & 21).

Finally, when asked whether the roles/function of the institutions differ, the majority of students responded affirmatively on the **pre-project** survey. Respondents from Bryan see two-year public schools as "typically tech schools," primarily aimed at students "who are not in the top of their high school classes but want to continue their studies." They see the purpose of all public institutions to "push their students through"; whereas, "private 4 year prepares [one] for life and career." In contrast, Columbia students feel two-year colleges are aimed at students that are "generally older and more serious about their degree. Where in the four year [we] get a lot of students out of high school that want to party and have fun." Columbia students view two-year institutions as places where "students figure out what they want to do for their careers and lifetime goals." MTSU students perceive four-year private institutions as "harder academic wise," "pay[ing] more for teachers," and "aimed towards upper class people." However, one MTSU student contends, "although more challenging, private institutions may not always be able to enhance a student's abilities as a four year public school setting in which interactions with the majority help to give the student more of an understanding of life." Despite the great number of diverging opinions, many students commented on the common goals of all three types of schools and on the focus of responsibility for learning: "All institutions offer the chance to learn about different things"; "College is the same wherever you go. You go to learn and you are the one who can take advantage of the place."

Turning our attention now towards the **post-project** survey, we can focus on the shifts in perception indicated by the descriptive data. We first tried looking at a 10% fluctuation between perceptions in the pre- and post-project questionnaires, but the results were too scattered and sporadic. So

we determined to look for 15% fluctuations (up or down) to arrive at more meaningful shifts. The post-project survey shows several areas of little to no fluctuation among the data and across the schools:

- ✓ Faculty credentials and experience (questions 8 & 9)
- ✓ Percentage of students completing their degrees (questions 12 & 13)
- ✓ Number of students who are academically prepared for college work (questions 14 & 15)
- ✓ Tolerance toward differences and openness to new ideas (questions 16 & 17)
- ✓ Number of student behavior problems (questions 18 & 19)
- ✓ Students with positive attitude toward learning (questions 20 & 21)
- ✓ Time/money/energy on sports to the detriment of academic programs (questions 22 & 23)

Conversely, other areas reflect interesting shifts, not necessarily a change in direction, but in degree:

- ✓ Bryan students perceive two-year institutions as having the most **open admissions**—44%-95%--AND four-year private the least open—52%-80% (questions 2 & 3);
- ✓ Bryan students perceive two-year as most **affordable**—64%-90%--AND four-year private as least—64%-85% (questions 4 & 5);
- ✓ Bryan students perceiving four-year as offering the most **academic resources**—60%-90%; MTSU students perceive all three to equal degree—29%-55% (questions 6 & 7);
- ✓ MTSU students perceive all three to equal degree as providing the most **individual attention** —11%-36%--AND four-year private as declining—67%-39%. Columbia students perceive four-year private as providing the most—23%-35%--AND two-year public as declining—62%-44% (questions 10 & 11).

The **post-project** survey also shows a decline in percentages for MTSU and Columbia students responding affirmatively to differences in roles among institutions—64%-58% and 69%-57%, respectively—thus, indicating increasing numbers of students at the public institutions who see the roles as less different. Some of the comments reflect these trends: "All of the [sic] similar in one way—they are there to make young adults become productive members of society. Through our dealings with both a public two-year institution and private four-year institution, we were able to make comparisons of all

three"; "Each of these institutions are there for students to gain a level of higher education. Each differs in certain areas such as size or cost, but they all benefit the same purpose."

In contrast, students at Bryan saw increasing differences after the project—68%-75%: "4year public schools get their students in and out. They don't care rather [sic] you fail or pass. 4 yr. Private schools focus on the student as a person not just a student." However, others agreed with their public schools counterparts and commented, "They are all there to educate students."

While we cannot say that our collaborative project was tremendously successful in changing perceptions among the students in our three institutions, we know that we have succeeded in raising their consciousness about several issues they thought divided them, succeeded in making them re-think some of their preconceived ideas. Several of their notions come from prior knowledge about the institutions. For example, the thinking that the four-year public institutions suffer from greater student behavior problems and offer less individual help emerges from their knowledge of larger student populations at those schools. As one Columbia student put it, "people = problems." Other notions, however, come from what they experienced in the project; one MTSU student comments, "These institutions are more similar then [sic] I had previously thought."

Predictably, student perceptions were not the only ones influenced by our project. We, instructors, were able to make some interesting observations, two of them on issues of self-image and student population homogeneity. For example, it is obvious from the survey results that Bryan students demonstrate a more positive self-image than their public school counterparts. Pre- and post- testing in areas about receiving **individual assistance** (questions 10 & 11), **positive attitude towards learning** (questions 20 & 21), and **number of student behavior problems** (questions 18 & 19) indicate very high percentages among these students; this is an interesting indicator despite the fact that they perceive themselves behind 4-year public institutions in academic resources (questions 6 & 7). Another interesting aspect about Bryan students, which they recognize for themselves, is the tendency towards homogeneity. The occurrence of high-percentage responses was greater for Bryan than for the two public institutions:

	MTSU	Columbia	Bryan
Number of Responses > 80%	3	4	9
Number of Responses > 70%	10	11	19

Bryan students recognize they have many qualities in common, "Christian, predominantly white, upper middle class," as opposed to how they perceive the populations of public schools, "a variety of peoples who want a degree (rich, poor, black, white)." One student comments, "Although private institutions are the least tolerant toward differing beliefs this is not bad for the students, because they can attend the private school that best fits their beliefs." These are but two observations our involvement with the project allowed us to make about students at our three institutions.

There are a couple of changes we know we will make to the project when we run it again. To maximize cross-institution interaction and optimize the opportunity for perceptual changes, we will introduce our students to each other much earlier in the semester, as opposed to waiting until the introduction of the profile essay assignment well into the term (third paper). We will also work to insure more equal access to the technology necessary to conduct interactivity among students. Additionally, changes will be made to the survey vehicle, itself, probably reducing the number of prompts—for example, eliminating those that would probably not be affected by the contact provided with the project and adding a prompt that asks for perceptions dealing specifically with writing instruction. Another change to the survey will involve revising the question formats to elicit varying degrees of agreement, which will result in more easy-to-compare data for the statistical analysis. However, in spite of some needed improvements, we consider the project a success in beginning the move towards changing cross-institutional perceptions.

Institutional Perceptions Questionnaire

After indicating the type of institution you attend, read carefully and respond to the following statements about three types of institutions of higher education--two-year public, four-year public, and four-year private. Place an **X** next to the response that best represents your attitudes/beliefs about each question.

			MTSU pre/post	Columbia pre/post	Bryan pre/post
1.	Which ONE of the following do you attend?				
	_____ a.	two-year public institution	0 / 0	100 / 100	0 / 0
	_____ b.	four-year public institution	97 / 94	0 / 0	4 / 5
	_____ c.	four-year private institution	3 / 6	0 / 0	96 / 95
Please give your opinion as to:					
2.	Which ONE of the following has **the most** open admission requirements?				
	_____ a.	two-year public institutions	56 / 48	69 / 70	44 / 95
	_____ b.	four-year public institutions	19 / 29	8 / 9	20 / 5
	_____ c.	four-year private institutions	17 / 7	12 / 13	24 / 0
	_____ d.	all three are about the same	8 / 16	12 / 9	12 / 0
3.	Which ONE of the following has **the least** open admission requirements?				
	_____ a.	two-year public institutions	19 / 16	27 / 13	36 / 0
	_____ b.	four-year public institutions	6 / 0	0 / 9	0 / 20
	_____ c.	four-year private institutions	72 / 71	69 / 70	52 / 80
	_____ d.	all three are about the same	3 / 13	4 / 9	12 / 0
4.	Which ONE of the following offers **the most** affordable costs--tuition, parking, books, extra fees?				
	_____ a.	two-year public institutions	78 / 84	96 / 96	64 / 90
	_____ b.	four-year public institutions	14 / 10	4 / 4	16 / 0
	_____ c.	four-year private institutions	3 / 3	0 / 0	16 / 10
	_____ d.	all three are about the same	3 / 3	0 / 0	4 / 0
5.	Which ONE of the following offers **the least** affordable costs--tuition, parking, books, extra fees?				
	_____ a.	two-year public institutions	3 / 0	8 / 9	16 / 10
	_____ b.	four-year public institutions	0 / 16	4 / 9	16 / 5
	_____ c.	four-year private institutions	94 / 80	89 / 83	64 / 85
	_____ d.	all three are about the same	3 / 3	0 / 0	4 / 0

			MTSU	Columbia	Bryan
6.	Which ONE of the following offers **the most** academic resources--library, access to technology, etc.?				
_____	a.	two-year public institutions	0 / 0	4 / 8	0 / 0
_____	b.	four-year public institutions	42 / 34	35 / 39	60 / 90
_____	c.	four-year private institutions	19 / 13	15 / 17	12 / 10
_____	d.	all three are about the same	39 / 55	46 / 40	28 / 0
7.	Which ONE of the following offers **the least** academic resources--library, access to technology, etc.?				
_____	a.	two-year public institutions	69 / 58	46 / 44	68 / 70
_____	b.	four-year public institutions	0 / 0	4 / 0	4 / 20
_____	c.	four-year private institutions	6 / 0	8 / 4	20 / 10
_____	d.	all three are about the same	25 / 42	42 / 52	8 / 0
8.	Which ONE of the following has **the highest** level of faculty credentials and experience?				
_____	a.	two-year public institutions	0 / 0	4 / 4	0 / 0
_____	b.	four-year public institutions	14 / 13	27 / 26	12 / 20
_____	c.	four-year private institutions	50 / 52	35 / 30	60 / 40
_____	d.	all three are about the same	36 / 36	35 / 39	28 / 40
9.	Which ONE of the following has **the lowest** level of faculty credentials and experience?				
_____	a.	two-year public institutions	64 / 61	58 / 52	68 / 60
_____	b.	four-year public institutions	0 / 3	4 / 23	4 / 10
_____	c.	four-year private institutions	0 / 0	4 / 0	0 / 5
_____	d.	all three are about the same	36 / 36	35 / 35	28 / 25
10.	Which ONE of the following gives **the most** individual attention to students?				
_____	a.	two-year public institutions	14 / 23	62 / 44	0 / 0
_____	b.	four-year public institutions	8 / 3	0 / 0	4 / 5
_____	c.	four-year private institutions	67 / 39	23 / 35	96 / 95
_____	d.	all three are about the same	11 / 36	15 / 22	0 / 0
11.	Which ONE of the following gives **the least** individual attention to students?				
_____	a.	two-year public institutions	22 / 19	12 / 9	16 / 20
_____	b.	four-year public institutions	56 / 42	70 / 65	80 / 75
_____	c.	four-year private institutions	6/ 7	8 / 4	4 / 5
_____	d.	all three are about the same	17 / 32	12/ 22	0 / 0
12.	Which ONE of the following has **the highest** percentage of students completing their degrees?				
_____	a.	two-year public institutions	25 / 13	35 / 44	16 / 30
_____	b.	four-year public institutions	17 / 19	12 / 4	8 / 5
_____	c.	four-year private institutions	22 / 32	19 / 35	52 / 45
_____	d.	all three are about the same	36 / 36	35 / 17	24 / 20

			MTSU	Columbia	Bryan
13.	Which ONE of the following has **the lowest** percentage of students completing their degrees?				
_____	a.	two-year public institutions	19 / 16	31 / 30	28 / 30
_____	b.	four-year public institutions	39 / 29	35 / 48	36 / 35
_____	c.	four-year private institutions	11 / 16	0 / 9	12/ 20
_____	d.	all three are about the same	31 / 39	35 / 13	24 / 15
14.	Which ONE of the following enrolls **the greatest** number of students who are academically prepared for college work?				
_____	a.	two-year public institutions	3 / 0	4 / 4	4 / 10
_____	b.	four-year public institutions	39 / 29	27 / 35	20 / 10
_____	c.	four-year private institutions	50 / 42	50 / 39	68 / 75
_____	d.	all three are about the same	8 / 29	15 / 22	8 / 5
15.	Which ONE of the following enrolls **the least** number of students who are academically prepared for college work?				
_____	a.	two-year public institutions	72 / 39	77/ 65	64 / 55
_____	b.	four-year public institutions	14 / 23	8 / 13	20 / 20
_____	c.	four-year private institutions	3 / 13	4 / 0	8 / 15
_____	d.	all three are about the same	11 / 26	12 / 22	8 / 10
16.	Which ONE of the following enrolls students with **the most** tolerance toward differences (gender, ethnic, religious, etc.) and openness to new ideas?				
_____	a.	two-year public institutions	8 / 7	59 / 21	8 / 15
_____	b.	four-year public institutions	64 / 61	23 / 30	60 / 60
_____	c.	four-year private institutions	8 / 7	12 / 9	20 / 10
_____	d.	all three are about the same	19 / 26	27 / 39	12 / 15
17.	Which ONE of the following enrolls students with **the least** tolerance toward differences (gender, ethnic, religious, etc.) and openness to new ideas?				
_____	a.	two-year public institutions	8 / 0	12 / 4	8 / 5
_____	b.	four-year public institutions	3 / 3	12 / 9	20 / 0
_____	c.	four-year private institutions	56 / 71	50 / 52	68 / 70
_____	d.	all three are about the same	33 / 26	27 / 35	8 / 15
18.	Which ONE of the following has **the fewest** number of student behavior problems (disruptive behavior, disrespect toward faculty, etc.)?				
_____	a.	two-year public institutions	11 / 7	12 / 39	8 / 10
_____	b.	four-year public institutions	0 / 0	4 / 0	8 / 10
_____	c.	four-year private institutions	53 / 61	39 / 17	68 / 70
_____	d.	all three are about the same	36 / 32	46 / 44	16 / 10

		MTSU	Columbia	Bryan
19.	Which ONE of the following has **the greatest** number of student behavior problems (disruptive behavior, disrespect toward faculty, etc.)?			
_____ a.	two-year public institutions	31 / 19	15 / 21	8 / 15
_____ b.	four-year public institutions	28 / 39	39 / 34	72 / 70
_____ c.	four-year private institutions	6 / 3	4 / 4	4 / 10
_____ d.	all three are about the same	36 / 39	42 / 40	16 / 5
20.	Which ONE of the following enrolls students with **most** positive attitude toward learning?			
_____ a.	two-year public institutions	9 / 3	15 / 17	4 / 11
_____ b.	four-year public institutions	14 / 10	12 / 9	8 / 0
_____ c.	four-year private institutions	39 / 39	12 / 26	68 / 74
_____ d.	all three are about the same	39 / 48	62 / 48	20 / 16
21.	Which ONE of the following enrolls students with **least** positive attitude toward learning?			
_____ a.	two-year public institutions	36 / 32	15 / 22	4 / 45
_____ b.	four-year public institutions	17 / 16	15 / 22	44 / 40
_____ c.	four-year private institutions	6 / 0	8 / 0	28 / 0
_____ d.	all three are about the same	42 / 52	62 / 57	24 / 15
22.	Which ONE of the following spends **the greatest** amount of time/money/energy on sports to the detriment of academic programs?			
_____ a.	two-year public institutions	3 / 3	0 / 4	0 / 0
_____ b.	four-year public institutions	72 / 74	77 / 78	96 / 95
_____ c.	four-year private institutions	11 / 3	8 / 9	0 / 0
_____ d.	all three are about the same	14 / 19	15 / 9	4 / 5
23.	Which ONE of the following spends **the least** amount of time/money/energy on sports to the detriment of academic programs?			
_____ a.	two-year public institutions	67 / 55	58 / 74	64 / 80
_____ b.	four-year public institutions	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0
_____ c.	four-year private institutions	22 / 26	23 / 17	32 / 20
_____ d.	all three are about the same	11 / 19	19 / 9	4 / 0
24.	Do the roles/functions of two-year public, four-year public, and four-year private institutions differ?			
YES _____	**NO** _____			
	yes	64 / 58	69 / 57	68 / 75
	no	31 / 42	27 / 43	32 / 25
	both	6 / 0	4 / 0	

Please explain:

25. Please share any other thoughts you might have about the similarities and differences between these institutions: